However, they draw the boundaries too sharply between these. For example, South found that the drug trade is a mixture of both ‘disorganised’ crime, like the conflict subculture, and professional ‘mafia’ style criminal subcultures. Likewise, some supposedly ‘retreatist’ users are also professional dealers making a living from this utilitarian crime. In Cloward and Ohlin’s theory, it would not be possible to belong to more than one of these subcultures.

Strain theories have been called reactive theories because they explain subcultures as forming in reaction to the failure to achieve mainstream goals. They have been criticised for assuming that everyone starts off sharing the same mainstream success goal.

By contrast, Miller argues that the lower class has its own independent subculture separate from mainstream culture, with its own values. This subculture doesn’t value success in the first place, so its members attempt to achieve their own goals, not mainstream ones.

Matza claims that most delinquents are not strongly committed to their subculture, as strain theories suggest, but merely drift in and out of delinquency. Strain theory has had a major influence both on later theories of crime and on government policy. For example, Merton’s ideas play an important part in left realist explanations of crime. Similarly, in the 1960s Ohlin was appointed to help develop crime policy in the USA under President Kennedy.

Recent strain theories –

Recent strain theorists have argued that young people may pursue a variety of goals other than money success. These include popularity with peers, autonomy from adults, or the desire of some young males to be treated like ‘real men’.

Like earlier strain theorists, they argue that failure to achieve these goals may result in delinquency. They also argue that middle-class juveniles too may have problems achieving such goals, thus offering an explanation for middle-class delinquency.

Institutional anomie theory –

Like Merton’s theory, Messner and Rosenfeld’s institutional anomie theory focuses on the American Dream. They argue that its obsession with money success and its ‘winner-takes-all’ mentality, exert ‘pressures towards crime by encouraging an anomie cultural environment in which people are encouraged to adopt an ‘anything goes’ mentality in pursuit of wealth.’

In America (and arguably in the UK), economic goals are valued above all, and this undermines other institutions. For example, schools become geared to preparing pupils for the labour market at the expense of inculcating values such as respect for others, or teaching students about home life (in the UK) as students aren’t taught about mortgages, taxes, bills, etc. usually. Messner and Rosenfeld conclude that in societies based on free-market capitalism and lacking adequate welfare provision, such as the USA, high crime rates are inevitable.
Primary and secondary deviance –

Lemert distinguishes between primary and secondary deviance. Primary deviance refers to deviant acts that have not been publicly labelled. Lemert argues that it is pointless to seek the causes of primary deviance, since it is so widespread that it is unlikely to have a single cause, and in any case, it is often trivial, e.g. fare dodging, and mostly goes uncaught.

These acts are not part of an organised deviant way of life, so offenders can easily rationalise them away, for example as a ‘moment of madness’. They have little significance for the individual’s status or self-concept. In short, primary deviants don’t generally see themselves as deviant.

Master status – However, some deviance is labelled. Secondary deviance is the result of societal reaction – that is, of labelling. Being caught and publicly labelled as a criminal can involve being stigmatised, shamed, humiliated, shunned or excluded from normal society. Once an individual is labelled, others may come to see him only in terms of the label. This becomes his master status or controlling identity, overriding all others. In the eyes of the world, he is no longer a colleague, father or neighbour; he is now a thief, junkie or paedophile – in short, an outsider.

This can provoke a crisis for the individual’s self-concept or sense of identity. One way to resolve this crisis is for the individual to accept the deviant label and see themselves as the world sees them. In turn, this may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which the individual acts out or lives up to their deviant label, thereby becoming what the label says they are. Lemert refers to this further deviance that results from acting out the label as secondary deviance.

Deviant career – Secondary deviance is likely to provoke further hostile reactions from society and reinforce the deviant’s ‘outsider’ status. Again, this in turn may lead to more deviance and a deviant career. For example, the ex-convict finds it hard to go straight because no one will employ him, so he seeks out other outsiders for support. This may involve joining a deviant subculture that offers deviant career opportunities and role models, rewards deviant behaviour, and confirms his deviant identity.

Young uses the concepts of secondary deviance and deviant career in his study of hippy marijuana users in Notting Hill. Initially the drugs were peripheral to the hippies’ lifestyle – an example of primary deviance. However, persecution and labelling by the control culture (the police) led the hippies increasingly to see themselves as outsiders. They retreated into closed groups where they began to develop a deviant subculture, wearing longer hair and more ‘way out’ clothes. Drug use became a central activity, attracting further attention from the police and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The work of Lemert and Young illustrates the idea that it is not the act itself, but the hostile societal reaction to it, that creates serious deviance. Ironically, therefore, the social control processes that are meant to produce law-abiding behaviour may in fact produce the very opposite.
However, interactionists reject Durkheim’s positivist approach and his reliance on official statistics. They argue that to understand suicide, we must study its meanings for those who choose to kill themselves.

**Douglas: the meaning of suicide** –

Douglas takes an interactionist approach to suicide. He is critical of the use of official suicide statistics for the same reasons as interactionists distrust official crime statistics. Both are socially constructed and they tell us about the activities of the people who construct them, such as police (in the case of crime) and coroners (in the case of suicide), rather than the real rate of crime or suicide in society.

For example, whether a death comes to be officially labelled as suicide rather than, say, an accident or homicide, depends on the interactions and negotiations between social actors such as the coroner, relatives, friends, doctors and so on.

For instance, relatives may feel guilty about failing to prevent the death and press for a verdict of misadventure rather than suicide. Similarly, a coroner with strong religious beliefs that suicide is a sin may be reluctant to bring in a suicide verdict.

The statistics therefore tell us nothing about the meanings behind an individual’s decision to commit suicide. If we want to understand their meanings, Douglas argues, we must use qualitative methods instead, such as the analysis of suicide notes, unstructured interviews with the deceased’s friends and relatives, or with people who have survived a suicide attempt. This would allow us to ‘get behind’ the labels coroners attach to deaths and discover their true meaning.

**Atkinson: coroners’ common-sense knowledge** –

Atkinson agrees that official statistics are merely a record of the labels coroners attach to deaths. He argues that it is impossible to know for sure what meanings the dead gave to their deaths.

Atkinson therefore focuses instead on the taken-for-granted assumptions that coroners make when reaching their verdicts. He found that their ideas about a ‘typical suicide’ were important; certain models of death (e.g. hanging), location and circumstances of the death, and life history (e.g. a recent bereavement) were seen as typical of suicides. One coroner said that if the deceased had taken more than ten sleeping pills, ‘I can be almost sure it was a suicide’.

However, Atkinson’s approach can be used against him. If he is correct that all we can do is have interpretations of the social world, rather than real facts about it (such as how many deaths are really suicides), then his account is no more than an interpretation and there is no good reason to accept it.

**Mental illness** –

As with crime and suicide, interactionists reject official statistics on mental illness because they regard these as social constructs. That is, they are simply a record of the activities of those such as psychiatrists with the power to attach labels such as ‘schizophrenic’ or ‘paranoid’ to others. Crime, suicide and mental illness statistics are artefacts (things made by human beings), not objective social facts.
For Marxists, corporate crime is a result of the normal functioning of capitalism. In this view, because capitalism’s goal is to maximise profits, it inevitably causes harm, such as deaths and injuries among employees and consumers.

At the same time, capitalism has successfully created what Box calls a ‘mystification’. That is, it has spread the ideology that corporate crime is less widespread or harmful than working-class crime. Capitalism’s control of the state means that it is able to avoid making or enforcing laws that conflict with its interests. While some corporate crime is prosecuted, this is only ever the tip of the iceberg. As Pearce argues, this sustains the illusion that it is the exception rather than the norm, and thus avoids causing a crisis of legitimacy for capitalism.

Some sociologists have combined Marxism with other approaches such as strain theory. For example, Box sees corporations as criminogenic because, if they find legitimate opportunities for profit are blocked, they will resort to illegal techniques aimed at competitors, consumers or the public.

Companies comply with the law only if they see it enforced strictly; where effective controls are lacking, for example in developing countries, capitalism shows its true face, selling unsafe products, paying low wages for work in dangerous conditions, polluting the environment and bribing officials.

**Evaluation**

Both strain theory and Marxism seem to over-predict the amount of business crime. As Nelken argues, it is unrealistic to assume that all businesses would offend were it not for the risk of punishment: for example, maintaining the goodwill of other companies that they must do business with may also prevent them resorting to crime.

Furthermore, even if capitalist pursuit of profit is a cause of corporate crime, this doesn’t explain crime in non-profit making state agencies such as the police, army or civil services. For example, state agencies in the former communist regimes committed crimes against health and safety, the environment, and consumers.

Law abiding may also be more profitable than law breaking. Braithwaite found that US pharmaceutical companies that complied with Federal Drug Administration regulations to obtain licences for their products in America were then able to access lucrative markets in poorer countries. These countries couldn’t afford their own drug-testing facilities and therefore relied on the FDA’s licensing procedures as a guarantee of quality.

**Realist theories of crime:**

**Right realism**

Right realism sees crime, especially street crime, as a real and growing problem that destroys communities, undermines social cohesion and threatens society’s work ethic. The right realist approach to crime has been very influential in the UK, the USA and elsewhere. For example, its main theorist, Wilson, was special adviser on crime
The causes of crime –

The second part of the left realist project to take crime seriously involves explaining the rise in crime from the 1950s on. Lea and Young identify three related causes of crime: relative deprivation, subculture and marginalisation.

Relative deprivation –

For Lea and Young, crime has its roots in deprivation. However, deprivation in itself isn’t directly responsible for crime. For example, poverty was rife in the 1930s, yet crime rates were low. By contrast, since the 1950s living standards have risen, but so too has the crime rate.

Left realists draw on Runciman’s concept of relative deprivation to explain crime. This refers to how deprived someone feels in relation to others, or compared with their own expectations. This can lead to crime when people resent others unfairly having more and resort to crime to obtain what they feel they are entitled to.

Lea and Young explain the paradox that today’s society is both more prosperous and more crime-ridden. Although people are better off, they are now more aware of relative deprivation due to the media and advertising, which raise everyone’s expectations for material possessions. Those who cannot afford them may resort to crime instead.

However, relative deprivation alone does not necessarily lead to crime. For Young, ‘the lethal combination is relative deprivation and individualism’. Individualism is a concern with the self and one’s own individual rights, rather than those of the group. It causes crime by encouraging the pursuit of self-interest at the expense of others.

For left realists, increasing individualism is causing the disintegration of families and communities by undermining the values of mutual support and selflessness on which they are based. This weakens the informal controls that such groups exercise over individuals, creating a spiral of increasing anti-social behaviour, aggression and crime.

Subculture –

The left realist view of criminal subcultures owes much to Merton, Cohen and Cloward and Ohlin, especially their concepts of blocked opportunity and subcultures as a group’s reaction to the failure to achieve mainstream goals. Thus, for left realists, a subculture is a group’s collective solution to the problem of relative deprivation.

However, different groups may produce different subcultural solutions to this problem. Some may turn to crime to close the ‘deprivation gap’, while others may find that religion offers them spiritual comfort and what Weber calls a ‘theodicy of disprivilege’ – an explanation for their disadvantage.

Religious subcultures may encourage conformity. Within the African Caribbean community in Bristol, Pryce identified a variety of subcultures, including hustlers, Rastafarians, ‘saints’ (Pentecostal churchgoers) and working-class ‘respectables’. 
(material wealth), while denying people the opportunity to achieve them by legitimate means (decent jobs).

A further trend in late modernity is for relative deprivation to become generalised throughout society rather than being confined to those at the bottom. There is a widespread resentment at the undeservedly high rewards that some receive, whether top-flight footballers or ‘fat-cat’ bankers. There is also ‘relative deprivation downwards’, where the middle class, who have to be hardworking and disciplined to succeed in an increasingly competitive work environment, resent the stereotypical underclass as idle, irresponsible and hedonistic, living off undeserved state handouts.

The result of exclusion is that the amount and types of crime are changing in late modern society. Firstly, crime is found increasingly throughout the social structure, not just at the bottom. It is also nastier, with an increase in ‘hate crimes’ – often the result of relative deprivation downwards, as in the case of racist attacks against asylum seekers.

Reactions to crime are also changing. Late modern society is more diverse and there is less public consensus on right and wrong, so that the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour becomes blurred. At the same time, informal controls become less effective as families and communities disintegrate. This makes the public more intolerant and leads to demands for harsher penalties and increased criminalisation of unacceptable behaviour. Late modern society is a high-crime society with a low tolerance for crime.

**The falling crime rate** –

In a later study, Young points to a ‘second aetiological crisis’, or crisis of explanation. The first crisis was the failure of existing theories to explain the cause of increases in crime from the 1950s to 1990s.

However, since the mid-1990s the crime rate has fallen substantially. This is a problem for realist explanations, because it suggests that crime is no longer the major threat they had originally claimed.

However, as Young notes, because crime is a social construction, it may continue to be seen as a problem. For example, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (2014) found that 61% thought crime had risen, not fallen.

**The rising ‘anti-social behaviour rate’** –

Crime surveys also show a high level of public concern about anti-social behaviour. Young sees this as a result of ‘defining deviance up’. Since the 1990s, governments have aimed to control a widening range of behaviour, introducing ASBOs (Anti-Social Behaviour Orders) in 1998 and IPNAs (Injunctions to Prevent Nuisance and Annoyance) in 2015. These measures have several key features:

- **Blurring the boundaries of crime**, so ‘incivilities’ become crimes. Breaching an ASBO is itself a crime, thus ‘manufacturing’ more crime.